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The President's News Conference in Crawford, Texas

August 23, 2004

The President. Mr. Secretary, thank you for coming. General Myers, Vice President, and Condi and I just had a long-ranging discussion with our key members of the defense team about a variety of subjects. We talked about Iraq, the way forward in Iraq, the way to help the Iraqis get to elections. We're making progress on the ground. We were briefed not only by the Secretary and General Myers but as well by General Casey and General Abizaid via secure communications.

We talked about transformation issues. We spent some time talking about the reconfiguration of our forces around the world, to better be able to keep the peace. And Mr. Secretary, I thank you for your leadership on that issue. The Secretary did a great job of not only coming up with a strategy to enable America to better protect ourselves and friends and allies against the true threats of the 21st century, but he consulted with our allies in such a way that the response was very positive and I thought very good.

We talked about intelligence reform. We just talked about a variety of issues that are important for the security of the country. And I appreciate you coming, sir. Thank you for being here.

I'll answer some questions. Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press].

2004 Election

Q. Some of your supporters are refighting the Vietnam war with their comments about Kerry's war record. Do you think that these attacks of this nature are unpatriotic, un-American, seeing as we're sending young people to war at this time?

The President. Yes. I think we ought to be debating who best to be leading this country in the war against terror. And that's what I'll continue to try to convince the American

people of, is that I'm the right person to continue to lead the country in the war on terror. I think we ought to be looking forward, not backward. And that's the kind of campaign I'll continue to run.

Swift Boat Veterans for Truth Ad/527 Campaign Ads

Q. But why won't you denounce the charges that your supporters are making against Kerry?

The President. I'm denouncing all the stuff being on TV of the 527s. That's what I've said. I said this kind of unregulated soft money is wrong for the process. And I asked Senator Kerry to join me in getting rid of all that kind of soft money, not only on TV but used for other purposes as well. I frankly thought we'd gotten rid of that when I signed the McCain-Feingold bill. I thought we were going to, once and for all, get rid of a system where people could just pour tons of money in and not be held to account for the advertising. And so I'm disappointed with all those kinds of ads.

Yes, Adam [Adam Entous, Reuters].

Kerry War Record/Leadership

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. This doesn't have anything to do with other 527 ads. You've been accused of mounting a smear campaign. Do you think Senator Kerry lied about his war record?

The President. I think Senator Kerry served admirably, and he ought to be proud of his record. But the question is, who best to lead the country in the war on terror, who can handle the responsibilities of the Commander in Chief, who's got a clear vision of the risks that the country faces.

Yes.

527 Campaign Ads

Q. Mr. President, some Republicans such as Bob Dole and some Republican donors such as——

The President. What paper are you with?

Q. I'm with Bloomberg.

The President. Okay, good. First time I've seen you out here. Welcome.

Q. Thank you.

The President. No problem. Did you write the story about the Vice President? [Laughter] Yes, go ahead.

Q. That's okay. Some Republicans such as Bob Dole and some Republican donors such as Bob Perry have contributed and endorsed the message of these 527 Swift Boat Veterans for Truth ads——

The President. Right.

Q. Do you—when you say that you want to stop all——

The President. All of them.

Q. Does that mean——

The President. That means that ad, every other ad.

Q. Would you encourage Republicans not to give to——

The President. Absolutely. I don't think we ought to have 527s. I can't be more plain about it. And I wish—I hope my opponent joins me in saying—condemning these activities of the 527s. It's the—I think they're bad for the system. That's why I signed the bill, McCain-Feingold. I've been disappointed that for the first 6 months of this year, 527s were just pouring tons of money, billionaires writing checks. And I spoke out against them early. I tried to get others to speak out against them as well. And I just don't—I think they're bad for the system.

Yes, Robert [G. Robert Hillman, Dallas Morning News].

Oil Prices

Q. Sir, on the price of oil, it's at or near record levels. Other than pushing for your energy proposals, which we know about, what else are you doing to try to mitigate the price of oil?

The President. That's the best thing, is to come up with a comprehensive energy strategy that encourages conservation, encourages environmentally sensitive exploration for natural resources in our own hemisphere. It talks about, of course, dealing with new forms of energy. And admittedly, those aren't going to come on market in time to deal with the current price of oil——

Q. Did you talk to President Putin about it this morning?

The President. Yes, I talked to him about it.

Q. What did he say?

The President. He said he recognizes that we don't need to be—he doesn't need to be causing conditions such that it hurts consuming nations. He's wise about that. But we've got a lot of countries beginning to use more energy, and we haven't done a good job of increasing supply.

Q. Just one more thing along that line. Are you concerned that the price of energy could become a campaign issue here of larger proportions than it already is?

The President. I think the people know that we have—this administration has been asking for Congress to pass a comprehensive energy plan for over 2 years. We recognized this problem 2 years ago and spoke out clearly and urged the Members of Congress to pass a bill, and it's stuck. So people know we've been proactive on the issue.

Last question. Yes. Hold on. Yes, Mark [Mark Knoller, CBS Radio].

Republican National Convention

Q. Thank you. Sir, how is work coming——

The President. You've got your earphones on so you're speaking very loudly. [Laughter]

Q. Sorry, didn't mean to do that. How is work coming on your convention speech? What should we expect from it? And are you worried about violent protests at the convention?

The President. Let's see. You know, I—people are allowed to express themselves in democracies, and hopefully they'll do so in a peaceful way.

In terms of the speech, I'm working on it. But I don't want to give you any tidbits——

Q. Just a little bit.

The President. I don't want to give you any tidbits, for fear that you may not pay attention when I actually stand up there and deliver it. [Laughter]

Q. Oh, he'll pay attention.

The President. You think he will? [Laughter] I'm looking forward to giving it. I want to talk about what I intend to do. We've got a great record, when you think about it: led the world in the war on terror; the world is safer as a result of the actions we've taken; Afghanistan is no longer run by the Taliban;

Saddam Hussein sits in a prison cell; Muammar Qadhafi has gotten rid of his weapons; Pakistan is an ally in the war on terror. There's more work to be done in fighting off these terrorists. I clearly see that. I understand that we've got to use all resources at our disposal to find and bring these people to justice.

When you think about domestic politics, we've faced a recession, had tax cuts that encouraged economic growth and vitality. We've helped reform a education system with the No Child Left Behind Act. We've reformed Medicare, first administration ever to get Congress to move forward on Medicare reform. We got trade promotion authority; it opened up more markets for U.S. entrepreneurs and farmers and manufacturers.

We've had a great record. But the only reason to even talk about the record is to say, "Give us a chance to move the country forward. We're people who can get the job done. We've proven to you we can get the job done, and there's more work to be done." And I'll talk about that in the convention. In other words, it's going to be a forward-looking speech.

Last question. I know you all are hungry.

Legislation To Restructure the Intelligence Community

Q. Absolutely. Mr. President, thank you. Intelligence Committee Chairman Pat Roberts has proposed a bill to radically restructure the intelligence community. He splits up the CIA, gives complete budgetary authority to the new NID, as well as personnel hiring and firing authority, and more—takes a number of intelligence collection agencies out of the Pentagon and transmits them over to the NID. I wonder what you think of that proposal, and what is the status of the White House effort on this front?

The President. I haven't seen it. I haven't seen his proposal. He was on TV yesterday morning talking about his ideas, and I'm sure he's going to send it over to us to take a look at it.

There is a lot of ideas moving around. And we've got a lot of smart people looking at the best way to fashion intelligence so that the President and his Cabinet Secretaries have got the ability to make good judgment

calls on behalf of the American people. That's what I'm interested in. I'm interested in how to get the best intelligence to my desk so I can be a good decisionmaker on behalf of the people of this country. And intelligence is a vital part of winning this war against these terrorists. We've got to know who they are, what they're thinking, where they are. And so that's how we're approaching this issue.

Now, listen, I've called for a National Intelligence Director because I think it's an important part of coordinating activities to make sure the analysis of information is as good as it can possibly be. I am not for anything standing in between me and my line operators like the Secretary of Defense. In other words, once intelligence is in place and once we come up with a decision as to how to act, I want to make sure the person responsible for the actions has a direct report to me.

And so we're looking at all options, including the budget option, all aimed at making sure that me and future Presidents have got the best information possible. And so Senator Roberts is a good, thoughtful guy. He came up with an idea, and we'll look at it. We'll take a look at it and determine whether or not it works or not. But there's going to be a lot of other ideas too as this debate goes forward.

Listen, thank you all.

Summer Olympics

Q. You're not going to Athens this week, are you?

The President. Athens, Texas? [Laughter]

Q. The Olympics, Greece.

The President. Oh, the Olympics. No, I'm not.

Q. Have you been watching them?

The President. Oh, yes. Yes, it's been exciting.

Q. Any particular moment stand out?

The President. Particular moment? I like the—let's see—Iraqi soccer. I liked seeing the Afghan woman carrying the flag, coming in. I loved our gymnasts. I've been watching the swimming. I've seen a lot, yes.

Listen, thank you all. Enjoy yourself.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 12:05 p.m. at the Bush Ranch. In his remarks,

he referred to Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld; Gen. George W. Casey, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; President Vladimir Putin of Russia; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Col. Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi, leader of Libya. He also referred to organizations described in Section 527 of the Tax Code. A reporter referred to former Senator Bob Dole and Bob J. Perry, chief executive officer, Perry Homes, a Joint Venture.

Remarks in Las Cruces, New Mexico

August 26, 2004

The President. Thanks for coming. *Vamos a ganar.* Thanks for coming. It's great to be here. I am proud to be traveling with my friend Rudy Giuliani. This is a part of the world, Rudy, where the boots outnumber the suits. Nice to be in country where the cowboy hats outnumber the ties.

I appreciate so many people showing up. I'm here to ask for the vote. I believe it's important to get out and ask for the vote. I believe it's important to travel this great State and our country talking about where I intend to lead the country. And I'm so proud to be traveling with a man who is a strong leader, a man who brought calm to the citizens of New York City during a tragic day, a man who helped lift the spirit of that important part of our country, Rudy Giuliani.

I told Rudy, I said, "Rudy, we're in good country here in Las Cruces." I said, "I know this part of the State well." You might remember I used to be the Governor of your neighbor. I told Rudy, I said, "I've been to Las Cruces a lot, and here in Las Cruces, you're going to find some really fine people." And after here, we're off to Farmington and then back down to Albuquerque. We're taking this State seriously. With your help, we'll carry New Mexico. With your help, we'll carry the country in November.

I'm sorry Laura is not here.

Audience members. Aw-w-w!

The President. No, I understand. I kissed her goodbye in Crawford this morning, and I said, "I've got to go to work." [Laughter] She said, you get over to New Mexico, and you remind them that her kinfolk were raised right down the road in Anthony. I'm proud of Laura. She's a great mom, a wonderful

wife. I'll give you some reasons why I think you ought to put me back in, but perhaps the most important one of all is so Laura is the First Lady for 4 more years.

I'm real proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. He is a fine man. I picked him not necessarily because he's the prettiest face in America. [Laughter] I picked him because he can get the job done. I picked him for his experience and his judgment. And I'm proud to be running with him, proud to call him friend, and proud to call him runningmate.

I'm also proud to be working with a great United States Senator in Pete Domenici. Pete is a—he's a close friend. He's a great New Mexican. He's a wonderful person. He is on vacation. I wish he and Nancy a well-deserved rest. I'm proud also to be here with the United States Congressman, Steve Pearce. I'm glad you brought Cynthia. It's good to see you both, proud to work with you.

I'm glad the mayor is here, Bill Mattiace. Mr. Mayor, thanks for coming—fill the pot-holes.

I appreciate Ted Scanlon and los Desperados for playing here today. I appreciate Mariachi Espuelas de la Plata. I'm glad they were here. Thank you all for coming.

Most of all, I want to thank the grassroots activists who are with us today. I want to thank Al Solis, who is the party chairman from Dona Ana County. I want to thank the people who put up the signs and make the phone calls. I ask you to register your friends and neighbors to vote.

We have a duty in this country to vote. We have an obligation in a free society to show up to the polls. Please do your duty and get people to vote. Get them into those polls. Obviously, when you're working to gather the vote, I've got a preference. [Laughter] In order to keep this country safer, stronger, and better, put Dick and I back into office.

We've been through a lot together in the last 4 years, and we've accomplished a great deal. But there's only reason to look backward at the record, and that is who best to lead us forward. That's what I want to talk about. I want to remind you, we have much at stake in this election, and we have more